

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL

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Worship Series: *Unleashed: God's Words Possess God's Power*

Service Theme: *Through the Word, the Triune God Blesses Us*

Sermon Theme: *Childlike? Or Childish? (June 12, 2022)*

Numbers 6:22-27

When people repetitively do the same thing for a long time, there's usually a good reason. And when that practice spans many generations, and stretches across different cultures of people, that tells us that custom has important value.

What we're doing this morning is an example of that. For over 1,000 years, across countries and cultures, the Christian church has used a specific Sunday of the Church Year to teach, remind, and focus people's hearts on the doctrine of God's Triune nature. So, what's the important value of observing Holy Trinity Sunday?"

For starters, properly understanding what God reveals about his "Three-in-One" nature in Scripture is foundational to the Christian faith. The Athanasian Creed, written largely to defend the doctrine of the Trinity against false teaching, states, "***This is the true Christian faith. Whoever does not faithfully and firmly believe this cannot be saved.***"

Although some churches today avoid discussing doctrine or theology, for fear of offending or upsetting others, if belief in the Triune God is a necessary part of saving faith, then we have to talk about and understand this doctrine, right? So, following suit with the universal Christian Church over the past millennia, that's what we'll do this morning!

But as we do so, there are a couple things we need to guard against. First, the mindset that "**What is unfathomable, is therefore untenable.**" And second, the mindset that "**What is unfathomable, is therefore impersonal.**"

Your discerning ears probably caught the recurring word in both statements: unfathomable. And there's a reason for that. Because when we're talking about the Triune nature of God, we're talking about something that is unfathomable-- beyond our ability to fully comprehend and understand. Because the Bible tells us that there is one true God. Not hundreds of gods, or multiple gods, but only one God. As God instructed his people in Deuteronomy, "***Hear, O Israel. The LORD our God, the LORD is one.***" That might not seem unfathomable, since plenty of world religions also believe there's only one true god.

But God also tells us in the Bible that he exists as three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All three persons are eternal, and equal in glory and power. All three are fully, completely, 100% God, not parts of God, like each person is 1/3 God. All three possess all the characteristics and attributes of God. And yet, all three persons are separate, distinct, and unique from one another, working separately from one another, but in perfect unity with one another for the same purpose. One God, not three gods. And yet, three persons.

Put all that together, and it probably makes your head hurt. It doesn't make any sense, right? So, over the course of history, people have proposed different illustrations to help explain the unfathomable. You've probably heard of St. Patrick's famous 3-leaf shamrock illustration. 3 leaves, but one shamrock. But if you rip off one of the leaves, is that leaf a 3-leaf shamrock? No, it's just a leaf. But if you're talking about the Father, the Son, or the Spirit individually, the Bible says they're individually 100% God, not 1/3 of God. The three persons viewed as parts of God, but not fully God.

Others say the Triune God is like water, which can take three different forms--solid, liquid, or gas. But a water molecule can't be all three at the same time. That illustration pictures God like an actor who puts on different masks at different times to play different roles. But the actor can only play one role at a time. However, at Jesus' Baptism, all three persons of the Trinity are present the same time—the Father speaks

from heaven, the Son is being baptized, and the Spirit comes down as a dove.

Every human illustration of the Trinity falls short of what God reveals about himself, or results in false doctrine. That's because we're using earthly means to try to describe something indescribable. The Triune nature of God is unfathomable—beyond our human ability to fully understand or comprehend. For some people, maybe you, that's troubling. In a world that demands empirical evidence and rational explanations, the fact that God's Triune nature we can't be understand from observations, formulas, or test tubes makes some people refuse to believe it.

But that's why we need to guard against the mindset that what is unfathomable is therefore untenable. Because the unfathomable nature of the Trinity should actually comfort us, and gives us great evidence of its reality.

The 4th century theologian St. Augustine was wrestling one morning with the doctrine of the Trinity. Walking along the seashore, he observed a young boy repeatedly running to the waves and filling up a seashell with water, then running back to dump the water into a hole he'd dug in the sand. Eventually, Augustine asked the boy what he was doing. The boy replied, *“I'm trying to pour the sea into this hole.”* In that moment, Augustine realized he was trying to do an equally foolish thing with God-- attempting to take the eternal, infinite, unfathomable nature of God, and fit it into his finite, sinful human mind.

God's unfathomable nature simply means we have a God who is that much greater, more powerful, more vast, and more glorious than we are, or could ever be. And that's comforting, because a God whose existence and nature we could fully comprehend and understand couldn't be much more powerful than us, right? But if our God is that much greater than us, that means he's also that much greater and infinitely more powerful than anything that can come against us in this life! It means our God is infinitely capable of caring for us, protecting us, providing for our needs, and ruling the world for our good!

The unfathomable nature of the Triune God is also powerful evidence of its truth. The polytheistic religions' belief that there are many different gods who have different roles or focuses in the world makes some logical sense, right? Or the monotheistic belief that there is one God who controls everything makes some logical sense, right? But the belief that there is only one true God who exists as three distinct, separate, but equal persons? That makes no logical sense!

So, which seems more likely to have been invented by human beings? If you invented a god you wanted people to believe in, wouldn't you describe your god in a way that people could understand? Not to mention, what human being could ever come up with the unfathomable description of the Triune God? The only explanation for the Bible's description of the Trinity is if...that's the true nature of the God who wasn't invented by mankind, but who has revealed himself in that way through his Word! What is unfathomable isn't untenable!

But we also have to guard against the mindset that an unfathomable God must also be an impersonal God. We might assume that if the Triune God is that far above and beyond us, then he must also stay above and beyond us. Like a clockmaker who made this world, then lets it go without any person relationship or intervention in people's lives. But our sermon text shows us why that's not true about the Triune God.

He displays his personal love for his people by instructing his priests to repeatedly speak a blessing on them. A blessing that you likely know well. *“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”*

There are a few important things to notice in this blessing. First, note the threefold repetition of God's covenant name, “The LORD.” This blessing is bestowed by the Triune God himself! Second, note that this blessing is directed to “you.” As God pours out this blessing on his gathered people, we might expect him to say “you” in the plural, addressing the whole group. Instead, he uses “you” in the singular, addressing this blessing personally to each person who hears it!

It's not like when they shoot t-shirts into the crowd at a Jumbo Shrimp game, where maybe one will come close enough for you to grab. God isn't throwing a generic blessing into the world, and maybe you'll get your hands on some of it. No, God gives this blessing directly, personally, and specifically to every one of you! The Triune God who knows you by name; who knows your struggles and your needs; who loves you personally, and desires an eternal, perfect relationship with you, just as he has an eternal, perfect relationship within his Triune self!

And look what this unfathomable blessing from this unfathomable God includes! He will bless you with everything you need, and so often with so much more! He will keep you-- caring for you, watching over and protecting you like a shepherd keeps his flock.

He will make his face shine on you. When we tell someone, "You're glowing!" it means they're radiating joy and love. And God's face radiates love towards you that puts to shame the groom watching his bride walk down the aisle, or the new parents holding their newborn. He will be gracious to you, giving you unconditional, undeserved love and commitment.

He will turn his face toward you. In ancient times, if you entered the king's throne room uninvited, and he turned his face away from you, they executed you! But if he turned his face toward you and made his face shine on you, that meant he loved and accepted you. It meant you would live with the king's favor! And he will give you peace, "Shalom," the Hebrew word meaning everything is in balance and as it should be.

And finally, the Triune God, whose name is repeated three times, promises to put his name on us. That's an unfathomable blessing! Because God putting his name on you means you belong to him!

Kind of like in the Toy Story movies, how it was a big deal when the boy, Andy, wrote his name on the toys in permanent ink, because that solidified that they belonged to him! God has also put his name on you, not with permanent ink, but with God's Word and water! When

you were baptized "***In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,***" the Triune God put his name on you, showing that you are a child of the Triune God for eternity!

When God first gave this blessing to the people of Israel, they had witnessed his power as he poured out plagues and free them from slavery. They'd experienced him giving them safe passage through the Red Sea, and then destroy their enemies with the crushing waters. They'd eaten and drank his miraculous food and water day after day in the wilderness. But what had he repeatedly seen from them? Rebellion, rejection, and almost constant grumbling against him and his appointed leaders. What should they have heard from God? What should we hear from God after he's repeatedly seen the same kinds of sinful rebellion and rejection from us? Certainly not a blessing!

But the Triune God who sent his Son, who literally gave himself to save us, has indeed been gracious to us. And while he calls priests and pastors to speak this blessing to his people, God says, "***I will bless them.***" These words of blessing aren't some wistful wish that might come true. These blessings are promises, because they're spoken by the unfathomably powerful, glorious Triune God, whose words possess his power.

As I said at the beginning, when a custom spans generations and stretches across cultures, there's something valuable about it. Maybe you've realized it, but we use these same words as the closing blessing for almost every one of our worship services. Have you ever wondered why? This is why! Because the Triune God who has promised and kept these blessings for 3,500 years to people like Moses, David, Mary, Peter, Paul, and Jesus himself—has promised the same unfathomable blessings to you every time you leave his house in his name. Be reminded of, and confident in these promises, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. When I speak them, hear God himself promising, "I, the Triune God, will bless you." Unfathomable. But true!